Chapter I

THE'BACKGROUND|OF HISTORY,,,AND PRINCIPLES

SINCE MEN first began to reflect and to ask questions in general terms, the difference between living things and inanimate objects, such as sticks and stones, has been a standing puzzle. Among almost all peoples in all ages the orthodox or generally accepted solution of the puzzle has been the assumption that the living being contains or comprises something over and above all that enters into the composition of inanimate things. But as to the nature of this something, this X, that was assumed to make the difference between the living and the lifeless thing, many different views have been held*

Not until civilization was far advanced did men draw the line between the living and the lifeless as sharply as we have learnt to do. Yet the fathers of Western philosophy in the pre-Socratic age drew the distinction pretty much as we do. The obvious and obtrusive factors of the problem were and are: first, that living things are more or less solid, weighty, resistant, occupy-ing space and enduring through considerable periods of time, they have the essential properties of material things. Secondly, every living thing seems liable to die; and when it dies it still retains for a time all its material properties ; it continues to be, so far as can be seen, the same mass of matter, having the same weight, the same resistance, the same structure, both in the large and in detail. All our modern science, all our vastly increased